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THE USE OF THE LANGUAGE LABORATORY TO TEACH THE READING LESSON.

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THE IDEAL LABORATORY DRILL FOR A READING LESSON SHOULD TEST COMPREHENSION OF THE MATERIAL AND ALSO BUILD UP AUDIOLINGUAL SKILLS. TO MEET THESE OBJECTIVES, DRILL QUESTIONS OF THE YES-NO, EITHER-OR, AND INFORMATIONAL TYPE MUST BE CAREFULLY DEVELOPED TO ELICIT APPROPRIATELY PATTERNED RESPONSES. THIS TYPE OF LABORATORY EXERCISE, COMBINED WITH SKILLFULLY DIRECTED CLASSROOM FOLLOW-UP DRILL, HAS BEEN USED SUCCESSFULLY IN BOTH INTERMEDIATE AND BEGINNING LANGUAGE CLASSES. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "THE MODERN LANGUAGE JOURNAL," VOLUME 52, NUMBER 1, JANUARY 1968, PAGES 23-25. (AR)

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The Use of the Language Laboratory to Teach the Reading Lesson

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IT IS much more difficult to make a truly useful laboratory exercise to accompany a reading lesson than one for a grammar lesson. The purpose of the laboratory drill on the grammar lesson is very definite: it affords the student practice in using the new grammatical constructions in the lessons so as to reinforce his knowledge of them and to make his responses on those constructions automatic. The purpose of the laboratory exercise for the reading lesson is more general; it is not ordinarily focused on one specific linguistic point.

It would seem that the ideal laboratory drill for a reading lesson should concern itself partly with the lesson itself, partly with the long-range aims of the language course. It should

1. test the students' knowledge of the material read;
2. give him an opportunity to hear the foreign language and in this way increase his ability to understand it;
3. afford him a means of improving his ability to speak the language;
4. make him more familiar with certain vocabulary items and idioms.

In the early years of the language laboratory, we used to put on tape a set of direct questions based on the content of the reading lesson. Each question was followed by an interval of silence for student response and then by the correct answer to a question in a complete sentence. Sometimes this answer was also followed by an interval of silence for student repetition of the correct answer. This type of exercise was good up to a point, but it had certain defects, the most serious of which was the fact that the answer to a given question could almost always be phrased in various ways, so that more often than not the student reply was not exactly the same as the reply of the voice on the tape. Yet both student and tape reply might be quite correct, and the listener had no way of telling whether or not his answer was as correct as the one he heard on the tape. What was needed were questions so worded that the student would be compelled to answer in a way

which would correspond to the answer given by the voice on the tape.

The simplest type of question which corresponds to this need is the "Yes—No" question. Supposing that in making questions on the first paragraph of Daudet's "La dernière classe" we ask "Est-ce que Frantz était en retard?" and direct the student to answer in a complete sentence beginning "oui" or "non" and to model his answer on the question itself. He would then have to answer: "Oui, Frantz était en retard." Or we could require him to answer "oui" or "non," using a pronoun subject wherever possible, and he would then have to reply: "Oui, il était en retard."

Some teachers might be inclined to object that the "Yes—No" question is too easy, that it does not really make the student think very much nor even test him adequately on the material read. If the sole object of the exercise were to make the student think or to test him on the material read, this objection would be valid, but the "Yes—No" question has other worthwhile objectives: it gives the student practice in hearing and understanding the language in a systematic controlled sequence, and it provides him with an easy pattern to imitate. And as a pattern to imitate, it must be easy if it is to become automatic. Any other type of pattern would not become automatic, and the purpose of the exercise would be defeated.

The second type of question which corresponds to our need is the "Either—Or" question. We could ask: "Est-ce que Frantz était en avance on en retard ce matin-là?" and direct the student to phrase his reply in the pattern set up by the question. He would then answer: "Frantz était en retard ce matin-là." The "Either—Or" question requires a somewhat higher level of understanding than the "Yes—No" question and is just as effective in eliciting a reply which corresponds to that given on the tape. It is equally useful in affording practice on a given pattern. It extends the cognitive demands required of the student, since he must now state positively a selection which he must make between two particular facts or ideas drawn from the content. It is the beginning of a discrimination stage of thought and a discrimination stage of communication. It remains, however, discrimination under guidance and control.

If the "Yes—No" and the "Either—Or" questions are carefully planned and deal with the same subject matter, they can be followed by simple information questions based on the same subject matter. The latter will almost certainly be answered in a set pattern. To illustrate, let us take a series of four questions on French geography developed through the three different types of questions:

Yes—No

1. Est-ce que Paris est la capitale de la France?
2. Est-ce que Tours est situé sur la Seine?
3. Est-ce que le Rhône se jette dans la Méditerranée?
4. Y a-t-il des souvenirs de Jeanne d'Arc à Marseille?

Either—Or

1. Est-ce que Paris est la capitale de la France ou de l'Espagne?
2. Est-ce que Tours est situé sur la Seine ou sur la Loire?
3. Est-ce que le Rhône se jette dans la Méditerranée ou dans l'Atlantique?
4. Y a-t-il des souvenirs de Jeanne d'Arc à Rouen ou à Marseille?

Information

1. Quelle est la capitale de la France?
2. Sur quel fleuve est situé Tours?
3. Où se jette le Rhône?
4. Dans quelle ville de France y a-t-il des souvenirs de Jeanne d'Arc?

The student has thus had a triple exposure to a set of structures and lexical items. It should be noted that in the third set, all cues are removed, and there is an assumption of mastery with regard to both structure and content. Whether this assumption holds true for a particular student working on a given series of questions is a matter of self-evaluation. It is here that we find a crucial application to foreign language learning of the concept of evaluation as feedback.[1] For in the final analysis, no materials, however carefully designed, can assure learning unless the learner himself has been trained to look for and recognize the behaviors

[1] Fred T. Wilhelms, "Evaluation as Feedback and Guide," Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, *1967 Yearbook*, Washington D. C.: National Education Association, 1967, pp. 2–17.

which prove that learning has taken place. It is thus to be stressed that inability to answer questions in the third group should be interpreted by the student as due to insufficient practice with the "Yes—No" and "Either—Or" type questions. Ability to answer these questions, on the other hand, becomes the signal that the student is ready for the classroom follow-up.

We have tried this kind of laboratory exercise both in intermediate classes which were reading a play, a novel, or a short story, and in beginning classes which were reading geographical and cultural material. The object of the lesson was always partly to test comprehension of the lesson and partly to build up conversational skill.

The following procedure was used:

1. We first asked the questions in class exactly as they were presented on the tape, and the students answered in complete sentences.

2. We then asked many of the same questions in indirect form, that is, as directed dialog. For instance, if we were using the above sentences on tape, we would then ask: "Monsieur Jones, demandez à Monsieur Smith quelle est la capitale de la France. "Mademoiselle Black, demandez à Mademoiselle Stone si Tours est situé sur la Seine ou sur la Loire. "Monsieur Wall, demandez à Mademoiselle Taft où se jette le Rhône."

3. Once we had covered the taped material through both direct and indirect questions, we then asked further indirect questions on material covered in the reading lesson which had not been taken up on tape.

The principal virtue of directed dialog is, of course, that it makes possible the experience of asking questions, which in turn require a different syntactic order and a different intonation. It also affords the student an opportunity to practice the interchange of *tu*, *vous*, and *je* pronoun forms with their corresponding verb changes.

Questions of this sort may be used profitably to induce the students to use certain very natural grammatical constructions. For instance, the student may be directed to answer all questions with a pronoun subject or with both a pronoun subject and a pronoun object. In gifted classes, we found that once the students had become accustomed to answering with pronouns, they began to use pronouns quite naturally in their classroom conversation over non-taped material.

Variations on these basic exercises are limited only by a teacher's imagination. For example, it is conceivable that complete assimilation of the material could occur more quickly for some students if the classroom follow-up personalized the learning by removing it from the context in which it was learned. Certain structures and lexical items could easily relate to a student's likes, dislikes, past experiences, etc. It is equally possible to use visuals as a means of cueing responses already learned in previous reading. Thus, when the student has learned the expression "Tours est situé sur la Loire," he might be presented a picture of Tours, which would add a graphic cultural dimension to the learning. Subsequent pictures of Paris and Washington would force the student to use the structure in contexts other than those in which it was learned.

Success with the tape script we have been describing is not automatic. The material for the lesson must be carefully selected and developed into the three types of questions; the students must be motivated so that they go over the tapes again and again in the laboratory. The instructor must complement the laboratory preparation with careful classroom drill. But with the right kind of tapes, the proper pupil preparation in the laboratory, and the subsequent follow-up in the classroom by the instructor, better comprehension and greater fluency in speaking the language can result.

SOUTHERN CONFERENCE ON LANGUAGE TEACHING

The fourth annual SOUTHERN CONFERENCE ON LANGUAGE TEACHING will be held at the Jung Hotel, New Orleans, Louisiana, February 22–24, 1968. The general theme of the Conference will be "Motivation and Language Learning: From Theory to Classroom Practice." This professional meeting is open to teachers of languages at all levels, and to school, college and university administrators. Featured speakers will be: Wallace E. Lambert, McGill University; Robert L. Politzer, Stanford University; Otis H. Green, 1968 President of the MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION; Stowell C. Goding, University of Massachusetts; F. André Paquette, Executive Secretary of *ACTFL*; and Rebecca Valette, Boston College. Information: Southern Conference on Language Teaching, Box 625, Converse College, Spartanburg, South Carolina 29301.